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AUTHOR	Towns, Kathryn; Jones, Bruce T.
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ABSTRACT

A Parents as Resource Program was offered in eight elementary schools in an inner city school system. Approximately 160 parents, mostly mothers, completed a 10-week series of workshops constructed to increase parental self-confidence, to develop awareness of affective childrearing practices and to demonstrate creative use of materials available in every home. Ninety percent of the parents completed weekly assignments and wrote descriptions of interactions with their children and 80 percent completed eight or more of the 10 sessions. When parents were asked to rate the series of workshops on a five-point scale, 97 percent labeled the series as very worthwhile while 3 percent chose the next highest category. Parents in the program seemed to become more concerned about their child's meals, clothes and preparation in school work and teachers reported greatly increased contacts with parents involved in the program. (Author/MP)

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The Ignored, Untrained Teachers: Parents

Kathryn Towns and Bruce T. Jones

The Pennsylvania State University
at Middletown

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The Ignored, Untrained Teachers: Parents

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Abstract

A Parents as Resource Program was offered in eight elementary schools in an inner city school system. The program was structured to be a preventative, rather than a compensatory, model. Approximately 150 parents (mostly mothers) completed the ten week series of workshops constructed to increase parental self-confidence, to develop awareness of affective child rearing practices and to demonstrate creative use of materials available in every home. 90% of the parents completed weekly assignments and wrote descriptions of interactions with their children. 80% completed eight or more of the ten sessions. Teachers reported greatly increased positive contacts with parents involved in the program.

Schools have become increasingly concerned with developing more positive relationships with parents. Gordon, 1975, Jacobsen, 1971: Gross et al, 1978, Luetje, 1978. A realization that compensatory models like Early Intervention programs, Get Set, Head Start, and Follow Through are not resulting in long term gains in skills for the children dictates increased attention to those other teachers, the parents.

Parents in the inner city school systems have been steadily alienated by black and white middle class teachers. These parents report their only contacts with school are when the child is in trouble. Further, some teachers reinforce the

parents' feelings of inferiority and alienation by requesting that parents not help children with their homework. The effective message to the parent is that the child is both "bad" and "dumb" and, further, that the parent in incompetent and "uninterested" in their child.

Rapidly increasing pregnancy rates among adolescent girls in inner city schools adds another special group which needs training in parenting skills. This group of parents is often supported by the grandparents of the child. Therefore, programs for grandparents should be considered.

How then can schools work toward better relationships with these parents? Early intervention programs have been developed which train parents (usually the mothers only) through direct work in the home. This is a very expensive way to provide training, although such training clearly operates as both a preventative and compensatory model. In addition, parent effectiveness training courses which have proliferated require leaders who are specialists and highly skilled in group processes. Many schools do not have such specialists and cannot afford to add them.

A Program for Parents

An inner city school system in a major eastern city has constructed a short term program for parents based on a preventative model. The goal of the program is to help parents recognize that they are indeed their child's first teacher and that parents are a valuable resource for both their child and the school.

The Parents as Resource Program has as specific objectives the following: 1) to demonstrate to parents the many competencies they do have, 2) to help parents capitalize on their own potential as guide and instructor, 3) to increase parental skill in creative use of materials/events ordinarily found in the home and 4) to acquaint parents with some affective child rearing practices. Since the program is centered on very specific skills for parents to use, it is a program that can be easily organized and presented by any school district.

In 1977-1978, the program was given in eight different elementary schools to approximately 160 parents, mostly mothers. The sessions ran for ten weeks with two-hour sessions given weekly. The leader was a black male with training in the use of affective techniques.

The Parents as Resource Program consisted of the following session themes: Getting to Know You, Home as a Learning Place, Table Talk, Enriching the Home Environment, Differences between Discipline and Punishment, Creative Play, Labeling and Explaining What Children See on TV, Taking a Trip, Family Rituals, and Review and Processing.

Session One, Getting to Know You, was assessed by the leader as the most important session. Parents reported that they did not feel comfortable in the schools and that all their previous contacts with the schools had been in a negative context. Several small group exercises were deemed necessary

to counteract these feelings. Further, peer support experiences developed from this session. Parents reported verbally that they were surprised to learn how many experiences and feelings they shared with the other group members.

The sessions on Home as a Learning Place and Enriching the Home Environment taught skills in using games and materials found in the home. One homework exercise proved particularly interesting for the participants. This involved developing a series of 31 things to do with your child; i.e., hug your child twice today, read aloud a story your child chooses, watch a TV program together and talk about what happens. Each day the child drew the slip of paper from a box and the parent shared the stated activity.

Table Talk, Creative Play and Labeling and Explaining what Children See on TV were sessions working on skills in verbalization and parent-child cooperation. The important difference between short and expanded sentences was emphasized. Parents practiced in groups and worked in "brainstorming" ideas for creative play using materials within the ordinary home. Guide sheets with several projects for home games and play were given to each parent.

Sessions on Differences between Discipline and Punishment and Family Rituals taught some of the basic concept of three parenting styles and the types of children from such families and such communications skill techniques as active listening, "I" messages and conflict resolution using the no-one-loses

method of problem solving.

The session devoted to a trip to the nearby public library was a very positive experience for the parents. Many of them had never before been in a library. During this trip the group toured the library and signed up for their own library card. If one of the objectives of the program was to help parents be better resource persons, then the parents would need to know how to use institutions of the city as resources. Further, a trip to the supermarket became a lesson on how to teach shapes, sizes, pictures, labels and even recognition of kinds of meats. Most parents expressed interest and pleasure in the concept of turning a shopping trip for groceries from one of "dragging along" the children to one of a shared learning experience.

Every session incorporated some emphasis on, and skill practice in, greater verbalization for the parents. If the parent can use expanded sentence structures and a more diversified vocabulary, then the child will model its speech pattern accordingly.

To help the parents become better resource persons, designs of various learning experiences, of ways to develop discussions with children and of ways to make better use of shared time were given to them. In addition parent-child activity sheets (See Appendix) were structured with five activities which related to each session's topic. Parents

were expected to return the activity sheet at the following week's session. 90% of the parents did three or more activities each week and wrote up the results. In addition parents frequently added information about what they liked about the session, although this information was not requested.

An Attempt at Evaluation

80% of the parents attended eight or more sessions. At the last session which was for Review and Processing, using small groups as the basic unit, many subjective statements of the success of the program were given. Sharing of both information and feelings about child abuse, about being dark skinned, about their own inadequacy when communicating with their children became an important, and unintended, outcome of the program.

Parents stated they never understood the concepts of discipline and punishment. They were accustomed to thinking of themselves as provider, disciplinarian (shouts and slaps) and the authority figure. They expressed excitement over the concept of parents as resource people, their child's first teacher.

In addition to verbal processing, parents filled out a simple one-sheet evaluation form (See Appendix). The first item asked them to report how many workshops they attended. The second asked them to rate the series of workshops on a five-point scale which went from "Not Worthwhile" to "Very

Worthwhile". 97% labeled the series as Very Worthwhile while 3% chose the next-to-highest category. (N=45)

Responses to the two most useful things learned were spread over nineteen separate replies which are tabulated below for those replies given by three or more parents.

Statement	Number of Replies
Communication Skills	13
Cooperation with Home and School	12
How to Deal Positively with my Child	9
How to Talk to my Child	8
My Job as a Parent	5
Things to do Together	4
The Importance of Table Talk	3

When queried about the one thing they felt was not worthwhile or interesting, only three parents responded. Two stated they didn't like doing worksheets with the children and one parent didn't like some of the other parents who attended.

Next, parents were asked if they planned to do anything differently in their homes as a result of the workshops. Eleven separate responses were given. Those which were given by three or more parents are tabulated below.

Statement	Number of Replies
Listen more to My Children	10
Be More Patient and Understanding	7
Spend More Time on Activities Together	4
Help with Schoolwork	3

When asked what they had tried at home that really worked, fifteen separate replies were given. Those replies given by three or more parents are tabulated below.

Statement	Number of Replies
Table Talk	8
Communicating on Feelings	5
Reading with Child	4
Talking of Family Rituals	4
Using "I" Messages	3
Using day-to-day Activity Slips	3

No parent responded to the query of what they had tried which did not work. When asked what could have made the workshops better, 12 replies asked for more time, 9 replies asked for more sessions and 1 thought more parents should be involved.

When asked for suggestions for future workshops seven separate responses were given as follows.

Statement	Number of Replies
Use this Same Instructor	7
Hold Sessions in Fall, not Spring	4
Hold Follow-up Sessions	2
Hold Sessions for Parents with Older Children	2
Work with Parents and Children Together	1
Include Older Children in the Sessions	1
Include Teachers	1

Unexpected dividends were reported by teachers as a decreased noise level on session days while parents were in the schools. Parents seemed more concerned about their child's meals, clothes and preparation in school work. Teachers appeared excited about the more positive relationships they were developing with parents. Several parents volunteered as classroom aides.

Summary

This program model is easily incorporated by any school district. Materials for the how-to handouts are readily available. Further, by structuring the sessions and hand-outs for its own ethnic and racial population, the school can generate emphases on bilingual families, grandparents and children family units or on single parent family units.

With a change to an emphasis on goal setting, decision making and concentrated practice on communication skills such as active listening, knowing the difference between empathy and sympathy, delivering "I" messages and using the no-one-loses method of conflict resolution, a program could be developed for junior and senior high school students and their parents.

PARENT-CHILD ACTIVITY SHEET

GROUP LEADER _____ PARENT'S NAME _____

SCHOOL OR CENTER _____

INSTRUCTIONS: CHECK THE APPROPRIATE BLOCK/S FOR THE ACTIVITIES YOU PERFORMED DURING THE WEEK AND BRING TO THE NEXT SESSION. A PARENT CHILD ACTIVITY SHEET WILL BE COLLECTED BY YOUR GROUP LEADER EVERY WEEK.

WEEK#

I ☐ TRIPS TAKEN.

WHERE? _____

WHO PARTICIPATED? _____

II ☐ SOCIAL SKILLS ACTIVITY PRACTICED.

WHICH ACTIVITY? _____

WHO PARTICIPATED? _____

TIME SPENT DOING ACTIVITY _____

III ☐ PARENT READING TO CHILD

☐ CHILD READING TO PARENT

WHAT WAS READ? _____

AMOUNT OF TIME SPENT READING _____

IV ☐ FAMILY RITUALS ACTIVITIES

WHICH ACTIVITY? _____

WHO PARTICIPATED? _____

TIME SPENT DOING ACTIVITY _____

V ☐ TABLE TALK ACTIVITY

WHAT WAS DISCUSSED?

WHO PARTICIPATED? _____

AFFECTIVE EDUCATION PARENT EDUCATION WORKSHOP EVALUATION

Please answer the questions for all of the workshops you attended - not just today's.

1. I attended workshops 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 (circle the ones you attended)

2. The workshops were

1	2	3	4	5
Not Worthwhile				Very Worthwhile

3. The two most useful things I learned at these workshops were _____

(1) _____

(2) _____.

4. The one thing which I did not find worthwhile or interesting was _____

_____.

Will you do anything differently at home as a result of these workshops?

If so, what? _____

_____

What have you tired at home that really worked? Please describe the event for us. _____

_____

_____

Anything else?

What have you tried at home that didn't work? _____

_____

_____

5. These workshops might have been better if _____

_____

_____

6. Any comments and suggestions for future workshops?

_____

_____

_____

_____

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